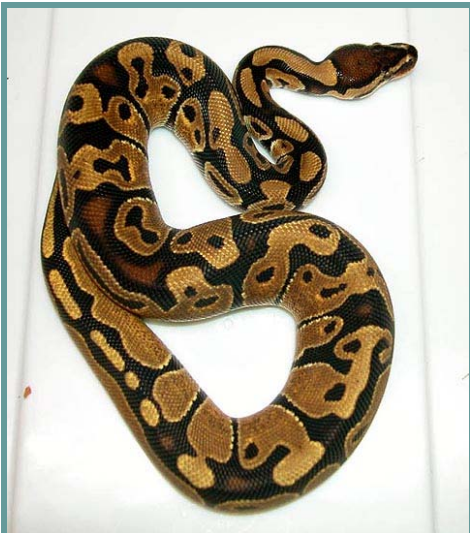


# *Safe Handling of Pet Reptiles*



**Reptiles can make wonderful pets, but like all animals, they can carry germs that can make people sick. Safe handling of reptiles is important to prevent illness in people.**

Pet reptiles such as lizards, snakes, or turtles, can carry germs in their digestive system (from the mouth to the stomach to the intestines) and shed germs in their feces (droppings).



Germs, such as the bacteria *Salmonella*, may be present on the skin or in the droppings of pet reptiles, even if the animal appears to be healthy. If these germs are accidentally eaten, when a person touches the droppings (or the animal) and later touches his or her mouth, or prepares food without washing his or her hands first, the person may become ill. Children are especially at risk for becoming infected because they are more likely to put their hands in their mouths after handling a pet.

***Salmonella* in humans** can cause an upset stomach, cramps, diarrhea, fever, nausea, and

vomiting. Most people get sick 12 to 36 hours after the bacteria are swallowed. Symptoms usually last for several days. Some people may get sick enough to go to the hospital. In rare cases, the bacteria can get into the blood and become life-threatening. Anyone can become ill from these germs, but young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems may develop more serious illness.



## To handle pet reptiles safely, take the following precautions:

- **Always wash hands with soap and water after handling pet reptiles;** use waterless alcohol-based gels or hand rubs when soap is not available.
- Keep reptile cages clean and free of soiled bedding.
- Clean the cage in a well-ventilated area or outside.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after cleaning up pet droppings.
- Do not kiss pet reptiles or hold them close to your face.
- Because pregnant women, persons with weakened immune systems, the elderly and young children (less than 5 years old) are at higher risk for more serious illness, reptiles should be handled and cared for by an adult who is not pregnant and/or living with a weakened immune system.



## For more information about handling pets safely, see:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, “Healthy Pets Healthy People” at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.htm>.
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health website at <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/epi.htm#pet> or call the Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800 or toll free at 1-888-658-2850.
- Or call your veterinarian.

